

THE NAUTILUS.

Vol. XL

JULY, 1926.

No. 1

JAMES H. FERRISS

November 18, 1849–March 17, 1926

James H. Ferriss, the foremost of American land-shell collectors, was born in Kendall Township, Kendall Co., Illinois. His father, William H. Ferriss, was a native of New York State. His mother, Eliza M. Brown, was born in Lowville, Erie Co., Pennsylvania. On the maternal side the family had long lived in or near Erie, Pa., where his grandmother, Adeline Sloane, was born in 1811.¹

In the fifties and sixties educational facilities in rural Illinois were not very good, and Ferriss' formal schooling did not go beyond the high school stage. He had a taste for reading and a retentive memory; in addition to these, he had a combination of qualities rarely found together in so high a degree: an intense interest in and sympathy for his fellow man, and a great love of nature. He was equally at home and happy in the turmoil of a hot campaign against the Joliet saloon and underworld forces, and in a lonely desert camp. That Ferriss did not go further in the more technical side of natural history was merely because life is too short; when at home, the demands of a large daily paper and innumerable details of park and other civic affairs absorbed his time.

As a boy, Ferriss at first worked with his father in the busi-

¹ I hope to receive further data regarding the Ferriss genealogy.

ness of buying cattle for the Chicago market, but in 1869, at the age of 19, decided to start out for himself, taking up a claim in southeastern Kansas. Until 1872 he was by turns farmer, freighter and storekeeper. It was the impression made at this time of the evil effects of drink in a pioneer community which made him a staunch advocate of temperance throughout his life.

In 1872 Joliet had a great access of population due to the establishment of steel mills. A "boom" was on. Tired of frontier life, Ferriss returned, obtaining a position as reporter on a Joliet paper. His knowledge of cattle and trade soon made his "market page" a prominent feature. Two years later he started a paper of his own at Yorkville, county seat of Kendall Co., Ill., but returned to Joliet in 1877 to take the management of the *Phoenix*. A few months later, with H. E. Baldwin and R. W. Nelson, he purchased the *Joliet News*. There was scarcely any real money in the Middle West at this time. The three young men, without capital or backing, hardly knew from one day to the next where to get money to issue the paper. One of Jim's fiery editorials offended a local political boss, and the editors of the *News* were jailed. The paper missed an issue, but release came the next day. The *News* was in the right, and became popular over night. New subscriptions and advertisements poured in, and the three proprietors did not miss any more meals.

From this time Ferriss was continuously editor of the *News* except between 1880 and 1882, when he edited a Maine paper backed by Neal Dow, the noted prohibitionist of those days. Finding the conditions irksome, he returned to Joliet, where the *News* thereafter was conducted by him as editor and Baldwin as business manager. In civic affairs the *News* stood for the best man, regardless of party, for better schools and a cleaner city. It was the terror of grafters and saloon politicians. In National affairs it supported the Populist party—an expression of the dissatisfaction of the Middle West with existing conditions. Loans contracted in the expansive years now had to be paid in a contracted currency. It was the era of unfair railroad tariffs and unrestricted monopolies. With the passing of these con-

ditions the party dissolved. Ferriss was National Chairman in the Convention of 1904. In 1915 he retired from active newspaper work. The *News* was merged with the *Herald*, becoming the *Joilet Herald-News*.

As a youth Ferriss was interested in the natural sciences, at first collecting trilobites and other fossils of the local Paleozoic. His first conchological discovery, I believe, was *Unio superiorensis* Marsh, which he found on one of several fishing trips to the north shore of Lake Superior, in the early nineties. Gradually the collection of mollusks and ferns replaced fishing as a vacation pastime. About 1896 he discovered the charms of the southern Alleghanies. "Surely it is an enchanted land," he wrote, "for I am homesick until I return." For the next six years he made annual visits to this lovely mountain region, in 1898 with George H. Clapp, in 1899 with Bryant Walker, Clapp, H. E. Sargent and myself. I suppose we will never forget this glorious trip. We felt that the combination of ravishing scenery, new snails and congenial companionship could never be surpassed.¹ In the following year Ferriss and Walker explored the mountains northward. Many new and fine land shells rewarded Ferriss' work in this region. Among malacologists, his name will always be associated with it, together with those of Rugel, Mrs. George Andrews and Miss Annie M. Law.

In February of 1899 and 1900 Ferriss made hasty trips into southwestern Arkansas, and early in 1901 a further exploration more northward and in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma). In March and April, 1903, Ferriss and I, starting in southwestern Missouri, hunted in other places in Arkansas and Indian Territory, thence into Texas, as far as the Devil's River and the spectacular canyon at the mouth of the Pecos. Among the new snails turned up in these several trips were such elegant helices as *Polygyra binneyana*, *indianorum*, *pilsbryi* and *unicifera*, the rare *P. kiowaensis* Simpson, and in Western Texas the genera

¹ NAUTILUS, XIV. Proc. A. N. S. Phila. 1900, 1902. It was in this region of East Tennessee and Western North Carolina that Miss Law had found *Polygyra chilhowensis*, and Mrs. Andrews *P. andrewsæ* and *Vitrinizonites latissimus*. Ferriss thought that if women could discover such splendid species, a man ought to find one "as big as a tincup, with spines."

Daudebardiella and *Cochliopa*, new to our fauna. *Lampsilis simpsoni* Ferr. was also from one of these trips.¹

February, 1902, was, I believe, the date of Ferriss' first Arizona collecting trip. It was a hasty one, mainly in quest of rare ferns, as he was trying to complete his collection of living U. S. ferns for the Joliet park. Land shells had second place, but he picked up enough to show the richness of the fauna, up to that time scarcely known. In 1904 snails had first place, and fine species of *Sonorella*, *Ashmunella* and *Oreohelix* were taken in the Huachuca and Chiricahua ranges. He described *Ashmunella walkeri* (Florida Mts.) and *Oreohelix clappi* at this time. The 1906 trip was with me, first in the Grand Canyon region, then south in the Florida and Chiricahua Mountains. Early December found us in the magnificent forest around the head of Cave Creek, the highest part of the range. Bivouacking at 10,000 ft., we woke one morning to find the world white with snow, and waded down to camp in Cave Creek through two feet of snow—a long day's tramp. In 1907 and 1908 Ferriss again visited the range, getting a few additional species in the southern canyons; in 1907 with L. E. Daniels. The land snail faunas of the Huachucas and Chiricahuas were described in 1909 and 1910.² No other ranges have supplied such remarkable assemblages of Sonorellas, Ashmunellas, Oreohelices and Holospiras.

In 1909, in company with L. E. Daniels, a trip was made across the Grand Canyon, on the Kaibab and Powell Plateaus. *Oreohelix strigosa depressa* in great abundance and variety was found, also the rare *Succinea hawkinsi* Baird. The results were published, together with those of our trip of 1906, in 1911.

In the expedition of 1910, L. E. Daniels and I joined. We camped in many ranges not before explored for shells: the Santa Ritas, Baboquivaris, Dragoons and others. *Sonorella ferrissi*, *S. walkeri*, *Holospira danielsi* and *Oreohelix ferrissi* were part of the loot. There was something new about every day. Daniels introduced hot lemonade as a pick-me-up after a hard

¹ NAUTILUS, XIV; Proc. A. N. S. Phila., 1903, 1905, 1906, etc.

² "Mollusca of the Southwestern States." Proc. A. N. S. Phila. NAUTILUS XVIII.

day's shelling. Ferriss would take his tin cup full before the final ingredient was poured in.

In the limits of my space, all of the trips in Arizona and New Mexico cannot be described, but the chief ones may be mentioned.

1913. Catalina, Rincon, Tortillita and other ranges; afterward with Frank Cole "a splendid guide and biscuit maker" to the White and Blue Mountains, on the Gila headwaters.

1914. With Daniels, into the Mogollons, N. M., where an entirely new set of Ashmunellas turned up.¹

1915. The Black Range, N. M., with the writer. From a series of camps along the ridge at 8-10,000 ft., and in magnificent forest, we collected such fine Ashmunellas and Oreohelices as *A. cockerelli*, *O. pilsbryi* and many others.² This was the last of the trips by wagon and pack train. Ferriss bought a Ford.

In 1917, 1918 and 1919 the ranges west of Tucson to Ajo, and those along the Mexican border, Tumaacócori to the Whetstones, etc., were explored, partly with Frank Cole, the best of guides, partly with Hinkley and Camp.³ *Bulimulus nigromontanus* Dall was one of the notable finds, the genus being new to Arizona.

The summers of 1916-17 were spent with the Sierra Club and in other travels in California.⁴ In 1919 with a party in north-eastern Arizona, an arid region, but of great interest for its wonderfully preserved cliff dwellings, natural bridges and Mt. Navajo.⁵

Early in 1921 a camping trip in the ranges around Death Valley was carried on in company with E. P. and Mrs. Chace. *Micrarionta* was abundant and varied. Later, with Prof. Edwin E. Hand and Dr. W. T. Miller, he went northward through central Arizona.⁶

In the autumn of 1922 Ferriss and I took the field in historic Santa Fé. The route was down the Rio Grande to the Organ Mountains, across the White Sands and desert to the Sacra-

¹ NAUTILUS, vols. 28, 29, 32; Proc. A. N. S. Phil., 1918.

² NAUTILUS, 1917; Proc. A. N. S. P., 1917.

³ Moll. S. W. States XI, 1923. NAUTILUS, vol. 33: "Along the Mexican border."

⁴ NAUTILUS, vols. 31, 32.

⁵ NAUTILUS; vol. 33, p. 109.

⁶ NAUTILUS, vol. 35, p. 123.

mentos and north to Nogal Peak, then into the Guadalupe range in southeastern New Mexico and Texas, and south to the Chisos Mountains in the Big Bend of the Rio Grande. The results of this trip will soon be published; there is a great deal of interest, since much of the ground was new. Early in 1924 Ferriss again visited western Texas.¹ His last trip, in the spring of 1925, was in the same region, but cut short by ill-health.

In later years Ferriss became increasingly interested in cacti, collecting great numbers for use in the beautiful monographic work of Dr. J. N. Rose, and for his own collection in a large greenhouse built for their cultivation in the West Park, Joliet. To spin along over a rocky desert with Ferriss at the wheel and at the same time looking sharply for wayside cacti was an education for the nerves. Very few large stones were missed. On a long trip the only place in the car free of cacti would be the bed-roll.

Ferriss was an ideal camping companion. He loved life in the open, had great endurance, an unfailing optimism, and an exhaustless store of entertaining talk. He was at his best in camp, and drew out the best in others. The prospector or cattleman who chanced to drop into camp often stayed swapping reminiscences around the fire far into the night—tales of the Indian times, of Apache Kid, Cochise Stronghold (where we camped), and of course, of the search for lost mines. Nearly everywhere Ferriss found somebody he knew, or who knew a friend of his, and he was heartily welcome in hundreds of places throughout the southwest.

As a collector he has probably never been surpassed. Ferriss found more new land shells than any American since the time of Thomas Say; and he generously shared his finds with those most interested. Some account of his discoveries will be given at another time.

The portrait now given is an excellent likeness of Ferriss as I first knew him. In later years his face, always strong and fine-featured, became deeply lined and bronzed by exposure.

Ferriss had no children. His wife survives him.—H. A. P.

¹ NAUTILUS, vol. 38: "On the Rio Grande."

(*To be continued*)